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TAGS: PREL PGOV TH

SUBJECT: SMALLER PARTIES CASH-STRAPPED, TALK OF MERGER

CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) High-level representatives of the Matchima, Ruamchai Thai Chart Pattana, Pracharat, Phua Phaen Din (Motherland), and Rak Chat Thai parties are currently in discussions about their political future, according to prospective Rak Chat Thai candidate Palangkool Wongluekiat and a Phua Phaen Din representative. Both contacts told us separately on November 6 that the five parties had been meeting at the house of Warin Buawiratlert in Chiang Mai to determine whether to merge or in some other way coordinate their efforts. (Note: Warin is the main astrologer for General Sonthi Boonyaratglin and other members of the Council for National Security(CNS).)

¶2. (C) The same Phua Phaen Din contact also told us on November 6 that the five small parties entered into these discussions at least in part because they are strapped for cash. He said the parties had understood that they would be backed by General Sonthi and the CNS, leading them to expect that they would receive substantial funding from these sources, but that the funding had yet to materialize. This lack of cash has made it difficult for the parties to operate, our contact said, citing the fact that Rak Chat Thai has been unable to name a party leader, and has named a candidate for only one constituency in Chiang Mai, with the rest of its list yet to be filled. In addition to the funding difficulties, he opined that the parties are also hampered by a lack of clear operational guidance from General Sonthi and the CNS.

¶3. (C) Comment: This last minute scramble by the smaller parties to coordinate their efforts comes as no surprise as they search for ways to attract voters who are likely to support the Phalang Pratchachon (People's Power) Party (PPP) due to its continued allegiance to Thaksin and his populist policies. To some degree, these negotiations may mirror the confused maneuvering of top-level officials in Bangkok. As smaller individual parties, they face daunting competition from the PPP, but if they join forces, they may believe they have a better chance of winning a few seats for the candidates selected to lead a united effort. New cooperative arrangements remain possible, but outright mergers now seem unlikely, given the November 7 designation of ballot positions for parties participating in the election. Whatever these parties decide to do, they will have to do it quickly since all candidate lists must be finalized by November 16.

MORROW